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SUBJECT: UPTICK IN VIOLENCE IN ALGERIAN COUNTRYSIDE

SUMMARY

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11. (SBU) Since late April, GSPC terrorists have intensified their attacks against both traditional military and government targets and civilians in areas to the east and west of Algiers. The GSPC has changed tactics and increased the lethality of its attacks. The Algerian Army for its part has initiated a steady wave of attacks against GSPC strongholds in the northeast, but has purposely avoided precipitous action to neutralize remaining terrorist elements during the final stages of national reconciliation. While this recent increase in terrorist activity is not unexpected in view of the upcoming deadline for terrorists to surrender under the terms of President Bouteflika's plan for Peace and National Reconciliation, ordinary Algerians are concerned. Embassy contacts report growing unease among the population and rising concern that violence is increasing despite the government's promises of reconciliation. In an effort to provide increased security as well reassure the population, authorities have reverted to security practices abandoned two years ago, including increased usage of road blocks and patrols in heavily traveled areas outside the capital. (End Summary.)

ROCKET PROPELLED GRENADES USED AGAINST A MILITARY CONVOY

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12. (SBU) On the evening of June 21, a military convoy was attacked on National Route 5 in the Kabylie mountains of the M'chedallah region. Targeted by rocket propelled grenades (RPG), the middle truck of the three-truck convoy was incinerated. During the attack and ensuing fighting, seven military personnel were killed. (Note: The preceding casualty figure and all others in this cable come from press reports and have not been confirmed by the Embassy.) This attack was reminiscent of the April 7 attack on a convoy of Customs officials in the Ghardaia region, in which RPG were also employed. GSPC use of RPG weaponry represents an escalation of force and probably signals the group's determination to remind the government and public that despite reconciliation efforts, the GSPC remains a viable force. The current members of the GSPC are hard-core terrorists; the odds that they will surrender and lay down their arms under national reconciliation are remote. In flexing its muscle now, the GSPC is mocking the very notion of national reconciliation and utilizing the weaponry it has at its disposal.

UPTICK IN VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

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¶3. (SBU) Over the past month, attacks on civilian targets have arguably represented the most notable departure from the GSPC's standard terrorist tactics. They represent a noticeable shift from the targeting of small, isolated civilians in remote areas to bolder, daylight attacks against solely civilian targets in either small cities (Boumerdes) or areas which have been largely pacified for the last several years (Blida). Two separate bomb attacks occurred near the bus station in Boumerdes (approximately 30 miles east of Algiers), one June 3 and the other June 20. Both attacks occurred in heavily trafficked areas of the city during daylight hours. On June 21, five Algerian civilians were killed in a daylight attack in the forested mountains on a road outside Chrea, 25 miles southeast of Algiers. On May 7, outside Blida, which lies 30 miles directly south of the capital, unknown assailants slit the throats of two shepherds. (Note: In the 1990s terrorists commonly beheaded and gutted their victims.) Ten citizens were also killed in a false road block April 23 on a road near Skikda, 319 miles east of Algiers near the Tunisian border.

RECENT SPIKE IN DEATHS A FAR CRY FROM THE 1990S;  
POLITICAL AND CLIMATIC CONDITIONS A BIG FACTOR  
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¶4. (SBU) The tally of total military and civilian deaths since the beginning of June has reached 31, compared to ten deaths in January. While this is a far cry from the numbers of deaths seen at the height of the terrorist insurgency in the 1990's, the numbers mark a notable upsurge in the current political climate. Several factors contribute to this uptick. As in 2000, when terrorist activity spiked as a deadline for terrorists' surrender approached, under an earlier amnesty plan, the same phenomenon is recurring as the window for terrorists to turn themselves in closes in the coming weeks. Aside from the political timing, the summer season itself offers favorable conditions for attacks: dry and sunny weather improves target visibility, while the presence of full foliage offers the best cover for undetected attacker movements. The increased availability and access to agricultural goods make foraging easier and conditions more conducive to hiding out in the mountains.

AN ATTACK ON THE ALGERIAN PSYCHE  
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¶5. (SBU) In conversations with the RSO, the Gendarmerie National opined that the spike in summer attacks had psychological implications for the Algerian population. As a precautionary measure not employed since 2004, the Gendarmerie National has increased its patrols of beach perimeters, and undercover civilian security elements are visibly circulating on beaches where Algerians seek to escape the difficulties of daily life. Increased security check points on major roads leading to the beaches on the northeastern coast, such as Intaya, are visibly apparent to ordinary Algerians, and contacts increasingly tell us the population is uneasy and concerned that the final stretch of national reconciliation is bringing more violence than tranquillity.

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